

Message Text

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44

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 OMB-01

AID-05 PC-01 /064 W

----- 104302

R 241236Z AUG 76

FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7913

INFO AMCONSUL BOMBAY

AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

AMCONSUL MADRAS

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE NEW DELHI 12426

EO 11652: NA

TAGS: PINT, IN

SUBJ: SYED MUHAMMAD ON TIMING OF ELECTIONS

1. IN AN EFFORT TO PIN DOWN THE GOVERNMENT ON THE EXACT TIMING OF ELECTIONS, CPI RAJYA SABHA LEADER BHUPESH GUPTA SPECIFICALLY ASKED MINISTER OF STATE FOR LAW SYED MUHAMMAD WHETHER ELECTIONS WOULD BE HELD AS SCHEDULED (I.E., BY FEBRUARY 1977). SYED MUHAMMAD'S RESPONSE, ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, WAS: "THE POSITION IS CLEAR THAT THE ELECTIONS WILL BE HELD, JUST LIKE THE EMERGENCY WILL BE LIFTED, AT AN EARLY DATE. BUT, AS I SAID, THE EXACT DATE OF HOLDING THE ELECTION IS ENTIRELY THE PREROGATIVE OF THE PRIME MINISTER AS IS WELL ESTABLISHED IN THE PARLIAMENTARY PRACTICE AND CONVENTION IN OTHER COUNTRIES." THIS EXCHANGE TOOK PLACE DURING THE AUGUST 23 RAJYA SABHA DEBATE ON THE REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE (AMENDMENT) BILL, WHICH AUTHORIZES REDISTRICTING OF CONSTITUENCIES AS A RESULT OF THE 1971 CENSUS. THE BILL, ALREADY PASSED BY THE LOK SABHA, WAS PASSED BY THE RAJYA SABHA LATER THAT DAY.

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2. COMMENT: SYED MUHAMMAD'S AMBIGUOUS RESPONSE TO GUPTA'S QUERY WAS INTERPRETED BY THE PRO-CPI "PATRIOT" AS MEANING THAT THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS WILL NOT BE FURTHER POSTPONED, THE IMPLICATION BEING THAT THEY WILL BE HELD BY FEBRUARY 1977. THIS STRIKES US AS A BIT OF WISHFUL THINKING ON THE CPI'S PART, SINCE SYED MUHAMMAD ONLY SAID THAT THEY WILL BE HELD AT AN "EARLY DATE" AND CAREFULLY AVOIDED SAYING WHETHER THEY WOULD BE HELD "ON TIME." MOREOVER, HIS CAVEAT THAT ONLY THE PRIME MINISTER HAS THE PERROGATIVE TO FIX THE DATE APPEARS TO GIVE MRS GANDHI PLENTY OF LEEWAY TO MAKE THE FINAL DECISION. FOR OUR PART, WE HAVE HEARD NOTHING WHICH WOULD INDICATE THAT SHE HAS COME EVEN CLOSE TO MAKING A DECISION. INDEED, MANY SIGNS POINT TO THE PROBABILITY THAT THE DECISION WILL NOT BE MADE FOR QUITE A WHILE.
SAXBE

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PERSONAL OPINION, LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 24 AUG 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: vogelfj
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976NEWDE12426
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760323-0199
From: NEW DELHI
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760826/aaaaavnr.tel
Line Count: 78
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: vogelfj
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 09 JUN 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <09 JUN 2004 by buchant0>; APPROVED <07 OCT 2004 by vogelfj>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: SYED MUHAMMAD ON TIMING OF ELECTIONS
TAGS: PINT, IN, (MUHAMMAD, SAYED), (GUPTA, BHUPESH)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006